

IICA- An Agency For Agri-Development

Caribbean ministers pledge to reduce rural poverty Additional resources needed for educating and training rural people

A meeting was held on Thursday 25th May 25, 2006 between Dr. Marikis Alvarez of IICA, Mr. Arnold Dorsett, BAIC and Mr. Godfrey Eneas, The Bahamas Ambassador to the UN's FAO. Several issues relevant to developments in the hemisphere, namely the recent accord between FAO and IICA were discussed.

This Accord was signed in Caracas, Venezuela at the Latin American and Caribbean Regional FAO Conference.

The purpose of the Accord was to facilitate greater cooperation between FAO and IICA thereby avoiding duplication of effort. FAO is an UN Agency with global responsibility for food production. IICA, on the other hand, is a hemispheric body under the aegis of the Organization of American States (OAS).

Discussions also took place on the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Centre (CATIE) where Mr. Eneas represents the Inter American Region as a member of the Board of Directors. IICA is one of the main financial contributors to CATIE, whose membership is drawn from principally from Central America; however it undertakes work in the Caribbean and South America. Steps are being taken to utilize the resources at CATIE to advance agriculture in The Bahamas, particularly in the area of bio-diversity, Agro-forestry and training.

Several issues were mentioned namely agri-developments in the Southeastern Bahamas and the role of stakeholders in the marketing of Bahamian produce, specifically the concept of adding value to local produce via further processing IICA has been a leader in encouraging diversification in Agricultural Sector of Caribbean States moving the region to develop more agribusinesses.

Saint Lucia/Rome, 26 May 2006 - Caribbean ministers and high level education, agriculture and rural development officials pledged greater efforts to reduce poverty among rural communities, but stressed that "raising the priority and increasing the action for educating and training rural people will inevitably demand additional resources."

"We pledge to use our best efforts to reinforce action to further reduce poverty among communities dependent on agriculture, fisheries, forestry and micro-enterprises for their well-being," they said in a communiqué issued at the end of the Caribbean Conference on Education for Rural People (Saint Lucia, May 18-19, 2006).

"While we can certainly expect our governments, our civil societies, our business sectors and even rural people themselves and their communities to support local initiatives in Education for Rural People, we shall need and indeed require the support of the Caribbean Development Bank, the World Bank and our bilateral partners," the communiqué said.

Caribbean ministers of education, agriculture and rural development noted that despite setbacks from natural disasters - hurricanes and volcanic eruptions - and an adverse world economy, there had been much progress in training and education at all levels in their region.

However, poverty and indigence rates remained higher among rural people than among the rest of the population. This was qualified as "unacceptable" by the participants, who agreed that education and training approaches should be changed so as to make new opportunities accessible and attractive to poor rural people.

The participants recognized that they could do more in association with civil society and the business sector.

They called upon regional and international cooperation agencies, particularly FAO and UNESCO, to assist in devising locally feasible systems of monitoring, evaluation and research to keep track of progress and to develop new strategies to deal with emerging issues.

The MDGs "Better education and training for people living in rural communities will increase employment and enhance livelihoods while contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals," FAO education expert Lavinia Gasperini said.

"Education for rural people has a direct impact on all the MDGs. In this respect, the Caribbean conference helped raise awareness on the importance of Education for Rural People as a crucial step towards eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equity," Ms Gasperini also said.

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The Caribbean conference on education was organized by FAO, the Italian Development Cooperation office, the Government of Saint Lucia, UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning, the World Bank, the Inter-America Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture, the Caribbean Development Bank , the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and other partners.

Several ministers and high-ranking officials from education, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development ministries of the Caribbean countries attended the Conference.